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Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

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I. Introduction

1. At its 9th plenary meeting, on 11 September 2000, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 6th, 10th and 41st meetings, on 2 and 5 October and on 18 December 2000. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/55/SR.6, 10 and 41).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on remote interpretation (A/55/134);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/55/182);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/55/259);

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on the utilization of the United Nations conference centres at Bangkok and Addis Ababa (A/55/410);

(f) Report of the Secretary-General on information technology (A/54/849);

(g) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/55/430);

(h) Note by the Secretary-General on the distribution of documentation (A/AC.172/2000/6).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/55/L.13

4. At the 41st meeting, on 18 December, the representative of Botswana, Vice-Chairman of the Committee and coordinator of the informal consultations on this item, introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/55/L.13).

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/55/L.13 without a vote (see para. 6).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

6 The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 43/222 of 21 December 1988, 47/202 of 22 December 1992, 48/222 of 23 December 1993, 49/221 of 23 December 1994, 50/11 of 2 November 1995, 50/206 of 23 December 1995, 51/211 A to E of 18 December 1996, 52/214 of 22 December 1997, 53/208 of 18 December 1998 and 54/248 of 23 December 1999 and its decisions 38/401 of 23 September 1983 and 52/468 of 31 March 1998,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences,[2] the reports of the Secretary-General[3] and the note by the Secretariat on the distribution of documentation,[4]

Having also considered the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions,[5]

I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work of the Committee on Conferences and takes note of its report,[2] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

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[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/55/32).
[3] A/55/182, A/55/259, A/55/410, A/55/134 and A/54/849.
[4] A/AC.172/2000/6.
[5] A/55/430.

2. *Approves* the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2001 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[6] also subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Authorizes* the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2001 that may become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

4. *Reaffirms* its decision that the headquarters rule shall be adhered to by all bodies, and decides that waivers to the headquarters rule shall be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations recommended by the Committee on Conferences for adoption by the General Assembly;

5. *Requests* the Committee on Conferences and the Secretary-General, when planning the calendar of conferences and meetings, to avoid simultaneous peak periods at the various duty stations and also to avoid scheduling meetings of related intergovernmental bodies too close together;

6. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat took into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A and 54/248 concerning Orthodox Good Friday and the official holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to observe those decisions when planning their meetings;

7. *Reaffirms* the provisions established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/11 and reaffirmed in its resolution 54/64 of 6 December 1999 regarding multilingualism;

II. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. *Reiterates its request* to the Committee on Conferences to consult with those bodies that consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources;

2. *Requests* duty stations away from Headquarters to keep statistics of requests for servicing of meetings;

3. *Reiterates* that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority;

4. *Decides* to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2002-2003 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision;

5. *Notes* the importance of meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental

[6] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/55/32), annex.

bodies, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States are met;

6. *Notes with appreciation*, in particular in view of the increase in requests for meetings of regional and other major groups, that services had been provided for 84 per cent of the meetings requested by those groups, in spite of the difficulties experienced in the meetings programme in 2000, while 100 per cent of the requests for facilities only were met;

7. *Notes with concern* the difficulties experienced by some Member States owing to the lack of conference services for some meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States;

8. *Urges* intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify the conference services, well in advance, of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groups of States;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide information on meetings of regional groups and other major groups of Member States not serviced by conference services in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003;

10. *Also requests* the Secretary-General, when preparing budget proposals for conference services, to ensure that the level of resources proposed for temporary assistance is commensurate with the full demand for services, estimated on the basis of current experience;

11. *Notes* the initial steps taken by the Secretariat to establish a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and reaffirms that its decisions in section B, paragraph 24, of resolution 54/248 and paragraph 180 of resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999 should be fully implemented by January 2001;

12. *Notes with satisfaction* that the creation of a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi offers great potential for Nairobi as a venue for United Nations conferences and meetings, and takes note with appreciation of the efforts being made by the United Nations Office at Nairobi to attract more meetings to its facilities;

13. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to report on the utilization rates of interpretation services and conference facilities at all duty stations;

14. *Takes note* of the information in paragraphs 20 and 21 of the report of the Secretary-General[7] concerning the improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the successful experience with respect to the events and meetings held there in April and May 2000;

15. *Requests* the Secretary-General to consider improving and modernizing the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to

[7] A/55/259.

accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

16. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to issue a revision of administrative instruction ST/AI/342 on the guidelines for the preparation of host government agreements falling under General Assembly resolution 40/243 prior to the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences in 2001, and to take into account administrative arrangements with respect to the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

17. *Welcomes* the fact that, despite various constraints, steps have been taken to increase the utilization of conference centres at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic Commission for Africa, and notes the plans for the future in this regard;

18. *Notes with concern* the lack of sufficient operational guidance in the management of the conference centres at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic Commission for Africa;

19. *Notes with deep concern* the inadequate staff structure and the insufficient financial resources allocated for the marketing of the conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa;

20. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to explore all possible options to further increase the utilization of the conference centres at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic Commission for Africa and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

III. Documentation and publication-related matters

1. *Notes with deep concern* the low rate of compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of documentation, and encourages the Secretary-General, in view of the impact of late submissions on the timely issuance of documents, to intensify recent efforts with respect to planning meetings and forecasting documentation;

2. *Reiterates its requests* that the Secretary-General ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages of the General Assembly;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to strengthen accountability and responsibility measures, where applicable, as requested in section C, paragraph 11, of General Assembly resolution 54/248, to correct the alarming situation concerning the submission of documentation consistent with the six-week rule, and requests him to submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session;

4. *Invites* intergovernmental bodies, during their organizational sessions or other appropriate periods before the commencement of the substantive work, to review with author departments the question of the availability of documentation for the proper functioning of those bodies, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session through the Committee on Conferences;

5. *Decides* that there should not be any exemption to the rule that documents must be distributed in all official languages, and emphasizes the principle that all documents must be distributed simultaneously in all official languages before they are made available on United Nations web sites;

6. *Reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General direct all departments to include, where appropriate, the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(a) A summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

7. *Reiterates* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and expert bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

8. *Reiterates its request* to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to submit its reports in accordance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B;

9. *Reaffirms its decision* that, if a report is issued late, the reasons for the delay should be indicated when the report is introduced;

10. *Reiterates its decision* that, if a report is submitted late to the conference services, the reasons therefor should be included in a footnote to the document;

11. *Encourages* chairpersons of intergovernmental bodies to institute time limits, when appropriate, for the introduction of standard documents by the Secretariat;

12. *Reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General ensure that the texts of all new public documents, in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations are made available through the United Nations web site daily and are accessible to Member States without delay;

13. *Also reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General publish, prior to the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, an updated version of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations in the six official languages of the Organization;

14. *Further reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General publish, as a matter of priority, the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations in the six official languages of the Organization, once their consolidation has been completed;

15. *Welcomes* the efforts of the Secretary-General to eliminate the backlog in the publication of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, and requests him to publish the current and future issues of the *Repertoire* in all six official languages;

16. *Notes* the recent progress in reducing delays in the issuance of summary records, and requests the Secretary-General to consider means, including increased cooperation within the Secretariat, to continue efforts to accelerate their issuance,

17. *Notes with concern* the comments of the Committee on Conferences contained in paragraph 112 of its report,[2] and requests the Secretary-General to

implement, as a matter of priority, the provision contained in annex II, paragraph 45, of its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997 and reiterated in paragraph 7 of its resolution 54/259 of 7 April 2000, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session;

IV. Translation and interpretation-related matters

1. *Reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General continue the efforts to utilize new technologies, such as computer-assisted translation, remote translation, terminology database and speech recognition, in the six official languages so as to enhance further the productivity of conference services, and to keep the General Assembly informed of the introduction and use of any other new technology;

2. *Also reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General ensure that training opportunities in the six official languages are equally available to all language staff, including those at duty stations away from Headquarters;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in exceptional cases where an interpreter is assigned to an interpretation booth for which he or she has not passed the requisite competitive examination of the Interpretation Service, to set up an internal examination with standards similar to those of the competitive examinations of the Interpretation Service, which the interpreter must pass before such assignment;

4. *Reiterates its understanding* that the introduction of remote interpretation is not intended to replace traditional interpretation systems without the explicit approval of the General Assembly;

5. *Reaffirms its decision* that, in the absence of a decision of the General Assembly to the contrary, the use of remote interpretation shall not constitute an alternative to the current institutionalized system of interpretation;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that trials of remote interpretation not be confined to specific duty stations, and that each duty station be considered as both recipient and provider;

7. *Reaffirms its decision* that the use of remote interpretation should not affect the quality of interpretation or in itself lead to any further reduction in language posts, nor will it affect the equal treatment of the six official languages;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that future reports on the question of remote interpretation include an analysis of all costs of any proposed system, its impact on the working conditions of interpreters, the level of service provided to delegates, the satisfaction of delegations with the interpretation and the technical aspects of this method of interpretation;

9. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that efforts continue to be made to improve the quality control of language services at all duty stations;

10. *Takes note* of the technical difficulties and timing problems referred to in paragraph 9 of the report of the Advisory Committee on the Administrative and Budgetary Questions[5] regarding remote interpretation, and requests the Secretary-General to further clarify the technical issues involved;

11. *Requests* that the Secretary-General comply with paragraphs 33 to 36 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 A, and also requests the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a report on possible measures to alleviate the excessive vacancy rates in

language services at some duty stations and to ensure the required quality of conference services Secretariat-wide;

12. *Urges* the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to implement the system of incentives to attract language staff to duty stations with high vacancy rates, and requests him to submit a comprehensive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session analysing problems relating to recruitment in language services at all duty stations and proposing actions to address them;

13. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, reflects the specificity of each language;

14. *Also reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General, in order to improve further the quality of translation of documents issued in the six official languages, ensure continuous dialogue between translation staff and interpretation staff, among United Nations headquarters at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and between translation divisions and Member States with regard to the standardization of the terminology used;

15. *Further reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General hold informational meetings to brief Member States periodically on the terminology used;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to conduct consultations, with Member States concerned, on the improvement of translation services;

V. Information technology

1. *Urges* the Secretary-General to fill expeditiously the three official posts in the Department of Public Information relating to web sites in Arabic, Chinese and Russian, in accordance with paragraph 151 of General Assembly resolution 54/249;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on policy issues regarding the translation of non-parliamentary and public information material into all official languages and the possibility of providing those materials on the United Nations web site in all official languages;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the implementation of the new re-engineered optical disk system, referred to in paragraph 9 of his report;[8]

VI

1. *Reaffirms* its decision 38/401 concerning the prohibition of smoking in small conference rooms and the discouragement of smoking in large conference rooms;

2. *Calls upon* representatives of Member States to abide strictly by its decision 38/401, and strongly encourages all users of United Nations conference facilities to refrain from smoking in order to avoid exposing non-smokers to involuntary passive smoking;

3. *Strongly discourages* smoking in the immediate vicinity of conference rooms.

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[8] A/54/849.